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ABSTRACT
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education system, the Department of Education in New South Wales,
Australia. It reviews the testimony of a significant policy maker in
education, the Scott Report (1989), and the findings of international
research that examined the restructuring of nine education systems.
In terms of their attributes, administrative policies appear to be
largely societal myths about social order and service, although many
examples of identity, eschatological, death-of-god, and other myths
were found. When these myths cohere with institutional rules, formal
structures, and the external policy context, they appear to generate
legitimacy, resources, stability, and the survival of
institutionalized organization. Where they do not, the converse
appears to be the case and could account for intervention. It is
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Contains 41 references. (Author/LMI)

Administrative Policy as Myth

R.J.S. Macpherson

This paper[1] examines the proposition that administrative policy has the properties of a myth, with myth defined as a grand narrative of explanation and justification. It illustrates the proposition with an example of radical restructuring in a large education system. It reviews the testimony of a significant policy maker in education and the findings of international research which examined the restructuring of nine education systems. In terms of their attributes, administrative policies appear to be largely societal myths about social order and service although there were many examples of identity, eschatological, death-of-god and other myths found. When these myths cohere with institutional rules, formal structures and the external policy context, they appear to generate legitimacy, resources, stability and the survival of institutionalised organisation. Where they do not, the converse appears to be the case and could account for intervention. It is concluded that since myths mediate existential, structural, social and political perspectives on the 'best way to be organised', mythic analysis should be developed as a way of comprehending organisation.

Greenfield (in Houghton, et al, 1975, p. 65) argued that we should identify 'organisation' with

> man's image of himself and with the particular and distinctive ways in which people see the world around them and their place in it ... organizations are the perceived social reality within which people make decisions and take actions which seem right and proper to them.

To do this will require an understanding of the way that people come to believe in a personal grand narrative of explanation and justification, or to others, the myths they use to justify this taking of action in 'right and proper ways'. It might be helpful to look closely at the way that myths work since (Miller, in Noel 1990, p. 110):

the *misreading* of myth by modern men and women has rendered myth [conceptually] powerless. To paraphrase Nietzsche, it is not *myth* that has died; it is rather that *we* have murdered myth by turning it into belief and meaning.

Some indication of how much is being missed was suggested by Meyer and Rowan (1977, p. 340):

> Many formal organizational structures arise as reflections of rationalized institutional rules. The elaboration of such rules in modern states and societies accounts in part for the expansion and increased complexity of formal organizational structures. Institutional rules function as myths which organizations incorporate, gaining legitimacy, resources, stability, and enhanced survival prospects. Organizations whose structures become isomorphic with the myths of the institutional environment---in contrast with those primarily structured by the demands of technical production and exchange---decrease internal coordination and control in order to maintain legitimacy. Structures are decoupled from each other and from ongoing activities. In place of coordination, inspection and evaluation, a logic of confidence and good faith is employed.

The role of myth has been overlooked in recent accounts of organisational change despite general evidence of mythic themes in the restructuring of administration in schools, state or national education systems. For example, before administrative policy was radically changed in 1989, the myths of equity, excellence and professionalism were used to explain and justify the administrative services provided by the Department of Education in New South Wales (NSWDoE), Australia (it had an annual budget of about A$2.75 billion and employed over 60,000 people to provide education services to about 750,000 students spread over an area of eight million square kilometres). These three myths were specifically identified, contested and reconstructed by the Scott Report (1989) in order to redirect the actions of administrators. And yet, contemporary analyses of these and many other radical administrative restructurings in the education systems of the Western world (eg.s Harman, Beare and Berkeley. 1991; Beare and Boyd, 1993; Martin and Macpherson, 1993) make no direct mention of the work of myth.

The NSW example can help develop the case for rediscovering mythic analysis. Since the establishment of State education in the mid 19th Century, public schools in NSW have been expected to serve society in many and increasingly different ways, simultaneously. The standard and modernist rationale for schools was that they had to provide a basic education in valued skills and understandings, educate students for life in a complex democracy, and prepare them for a career and for further and higher education. In recent decades these expectations have been confused by two additional proposals; that schools positively discriminate in favour of minority, individual and special community interests, and that the purposes of state schools should not be over-rationalised and translated into bureaucratic structures in a post-modern world of gross uncertainty (Miller, 1990).

Decades of incremental elaborations to the formal structures, however, meant that the highly centralised structures and systems valued the delivery of homogenous services. The Head Office and 13 'Functional Directorates' of the NSWDoE provided policy advisory services, operational directions and logistical support from 'the Centre'. The fundamental justifications for such structures were the official policies of equity, excellence and professionalism; students attending NSW Departmental schools were meant to have equal access to much the same high quality experience. This was consistent with one of the great Australian public service myths; that bureaucracy could and should deliver egalitarianism in the Outback, even beyond the Black Stump (Davies, in French, 1960).

Political intervention, however, challenged the bureaucratic rationality (Rizvi, 1985) involved and its legitimation myths. In essence, public and Ministerial concerns for efficiency and choice supplemented the *a priori* concerns for equity, excellence and professionalism, and their administrative hand-maiden, centralism. While the details of the contest are still very controversial, what is incontrovertible is that the reconstruction of administrative policy proposed by the Scott Report (1989) set out to provide an alternative set of myths. The main phases of myth realignment can be summarised using data provided by a participant observer of the policy production process (Macpherson, 1992).

The first phase of the reconstruction of administrative policy sought to establish the moral credentials of a new administrative policy. A suite of principles, consequences and "basic objectives" were developed to justify a "breakthrough" strategy. This breakthrough strategy was intended to create the environment for fundamental change to occur. It was a creation myth. While many, quite understandably, focussed on the surgical dynamics of

rationalisation, namely career changes and opportunities, the deeper, more genetic agenda, was overlooked. The target of the breakthrough strategy was the belief system of administrators, their mythic commitments.

Whether or not he was right, Scott took the view that the traditional administrative practices of the NSWDoE (Hogan and West, 1980) were sustained by myths about what should count as valuable management, and that these myths would have to be reconstructed if practices were to change. To this end he contested three potent myths as the cement of dynamic conservatism (Schon, 1989) in NSW:

- 'we provide equity of opportunity and access' and yet outcomes were inequitous, there were symbiotic central power bases and bureaucracies, there was little acknowledgment of local needs. or support for operational units, and there were mechanistic personnel practices;

- 'we have a commitment to excellence' and yet there was no systematic and continuing assessment of teaching, 'bad' teachers were rarely fired, little upgrading of teachers' skills occurred, and curriculum development was slow and poorly supported; and

- 'teachers know best' and yet they had little interest, education or experience in management, tended to exhibit a 1960s orientation to life, had limited contact with the rapidly changing world outside schools, and were generally intolerant of practices used effectively elsewhere (even in other caring professions) on the grounds that 'education is unique.'

Having destabilised the myths that prevented anything other that slow, consensus-based and incremental change, Scott's second phase was to deconstruct myths about relationships between administrators at work. He attacked on seven fronts; an inputs orientation, excessive and ineffective bureaucratisation, resource under-utilisation, poor human resource management, school level alienation, inadequate equipment and facilities, and inappropriate budgeting and financial restrictions. This legitimised his alternative; a creation, societal and identity myth termed *School Renewal.*

The third phase was intended to reconstruct assumptions about appropriate administrative service. In *School Renewal* Scott focussed attention on the organisational unit he believed

to be most able to improve the quality of the relationship between a teacher teaching and a student learning; the school. A new moral touchstone was provided. All future structures and practices had to be justified in terms of how they supported or improved schools (Scott, 1989, pp. 5-6). Particular metaphors marked the parameters of the new administrative myth. The redistribution of power was explained as 'devolution.' Administrative work attitudes and practices were recast as 'school support structures.' School leadership and pedagogy were interpreted in terms of 'an effective school.'

Scott's final phase was to elaborate the changes required over five years He proposed giving schools far greater control over their own resources and system support for school-based development. He also designed a series of initiatives and devices to alter the fundamental nature of relationships and practices in school education and educational administration, all consistent with his over-arching modernist narrative termed *School Renewal*. His proposals were implemented with generally high levels of fidelity, despite political turbulence, a change of Minister and an election which produced a minority government in New South Wales.

While history can be the judge of the NSWDoE, the Scott Report, and the Department of School Education that rose out of it, two points can be emphasised here. First, in terms of Meyer and Rowan's proposals, the NSWDoE had retained highly centralised formal structures well after the recognition of societal pluralism had led to many forms of devolution elsewhere in Australian public administration. The institutional rules functioning as myths had been losing legitimacy, making it harder for the institution to sustain its claim on public resources, including political support or inattention, its internal stability and its longer term survival. Falling coherence between the formal structures and the myths of the external environment could, therefore, help account for the gradual decoupling with and between schools, the increasingly symbolic forms of accountability and the steady unravelling of confidence and faith in state schools. Second, an understanding of how myths work in administrative policy making provides a route to understanding better the meanings that administrators and would-be-reformers give to their practices and the appropriateness of formal structures. Since these meanings, honourable intentions and formal structures tend to be described as 'administrative policy', the term could be a power-laden metaphor for modernist myth.

Myth

In common language, the word myth can be used to mean a fairy tale, an imaginative story, unbelievable and fantastic writings, that which is not-quite-believable, and that which is false. It is sometimes used as a term of disparagement to dismiss the reliability of a knowledge claim, a statement or an idea. The technically accurate meanings of myth, however, give no licence for such disparagement. They have been classified (Macquarie Dictionary, 1990, p. 624) in four ways; a traditional story which attempts to explain natural phenomena and the creation of the world and its inhabitants, stories or matters of this kind (as in the realm of myth), any invented story, and an imaginary or fictitious thing or person. The Greek word *muthos* meant 'word', 'speech', 'the thing spoken', 'the tale told', that is, any information transmitted. The four classic functions of myths (Campbell, 1974, pp. 519-522) are to guide people in their personal lives, in their social roles, in their efforts to make an orderly image of the world and in their responses to life's great mysteries.

To those that believe in them, myths are stories with a special difference; they explain the situation, justify action and reify social constructions and structure - the very essence and intention of administrative policies (Bates, 1982; Foster, 1986). Myths achieve this using a grand narrative (Lowry, 1982, pp. 3-4):

> whose vivid symbols render concrete a special perception about people and their world. Many myths embody a people's perception of the deepest truths, those truths that give purpose, direction, *meaning* to that people's life. That myths use concrete symbols to express abstractions accounts for their unrealistic trappings. That they often embody the essence of our experience accounts for their power. Whether or not a particular myth corresponds to scientific fact as presently understood is ... unimportant. What makes a myth important is how it guides our personal lives, supports or challenges a specific social order, makes our physical world a manageable place, or helps us accept life's mysteries---including misfortune and death---with serenity.

Myths have an honourable tradition in the development of organisations and civilisations (Larue, 1975). Sophisticated ancient documents provide evidence of mature observation,

reflection, insight and intellectual organisation, and regularly use mythic themes to interpret the world. The possession of myths now unknown to us, the continuing reinterpretation of key concepts through the centuries, and the simultaneous recognition of several mythical interpretations of themes central to human experience (such as the contest between good and evil, creating community out of individual desires, and the search for personal identity and wisdom), together warn against defining myths as fixed creedal statements, ethnic traits or linguistic artefacts specific to one culture.

On the other hand, in their time and context, myths were and are believed as fact, and indeed, intended to be believed. Despite their being no more materially substantial than a theme in a collective imagination, myths provide apparently reasonable and authoritative explanations of why the world, or the organisation, is as it is. Myth is intimately embedded in and explicit as attitudes towards life, death, survival, and above all, in the meanings people give to 'the situation' and what it is 'to be human'. Larue (1975, p.9) summarised how myths work:

> Through myth, man [sic] is able to give order and structure to his world and perhaps bring meaning or purpose to an existence that otherwise may appear meaningless. By mythically defining and structuring his world, man provides himself with an appreciation and understanding of areas outside human control which affect human well-being and destiny. The structure or order may in itself be interpreted as a kind of status quo into which myth gives insight. The myth explains why life is as it is and what man's significance is, and provides an understanding that to be human, to be alive, and to have purpose is to move beyond the bounds of animal existence. Myth supports existing social structure, patterns of belief and conduct and the current interpretation of the world.

Hence, myths tend to program the attitudes of individuals and groups and to encourage an uncritical acceptance of the established norms of a particular organisation or society. For example, in a longitudinal study of governance in the Scottish education system, McPherson and Raab (1988, p. 99) identified the extent to which the assumptive world of educationalists was "deeply persuasive to those who shared it", and how, when educators had been socialised into this culture of professionalism, they became "busy, but blind". Members were unaware that their beliefs were sustained by myths. The production of unawareness was explained by Sproul (1979, p. 3.):

because of the way in which domestic myths are transmitted, people often never learn that they *are* myths; people have become submerged in their own viewpoints, prisoners of their own traditions. They readily confuse attitudes towards reality (proclamations of value) with reality itself (statements of fact). Failing to see their own myths as myths, they consider all other myths to be false. They do not understand that the truth of all myths is existential and not necessarily theoretical. That is, they forget that myths are true to the extent they are effective.

This is why myths act as self-fulfilling prophecies and explains how administrators straddle the fact-value divide and commit the naturalistic fallacy with impunity. Myths create facts out of the values they propound. For example, the articulation of an administrative policy generates 'the facts' about 'the situation', and 'real' structures, functions, responsibilities and appropriate actions. Bias is mobilised. If position holders think that they must lead, they are set up to dominate others in furtherance of what they believe to be organisational purposes. Similarly, if position holders think that they should enhance leadership services they are set up to give high priority to collecting feedback and to nurturing everyone's knowledge and capacities to do with leadership. To illustrate implications further, data are now drawn from an international study of how administrative policies were restructured in systems of state schools (Martin and Macpherson, 1993).

Administrative Policy

Nine case studies (Cornell, 1993; Hickcox, 1993; Martin, 1993, Sackney, 1993; Lam, 1993; Ginsberg and Berry, 1993; Holmes and Ormston, 1993; Macpherson, 1993a: 1993b) were examined in their philosophical, practical and historical contexts (Hodgkinson, 1993; Griffiths, 1993; Fleming, 1993). Action analysis identified six forms of administrative service; philosophy, strategic analysis and planning, politics, cultural agency, management and evaluation. While interdependent, and often occurring simultaneously, these types of activity were found to be central to the processes that determined people used to reorganise others' views of 'best administrative practice'. An analysis of the sociology of knowledge involved (Macpherson, 1993c) concluded that the processes were all focussed on changing the dominant myths about 'how best to be

organised'. The processes identified can be summarised, while noting that the details of the varying conditions and contexts have been discussed elsewhere (Harman, Beare and Berkeley, 1991; Beare and Boyd, 1993, Martin and Macpherson, 1993).

In sum, the processes occurred in three metaphysical worlds. Philosophical and strategic activity occurred in an abstract world of ideas. Political and cultural agency occurred in a social world, a world of contested powers, realities and meanings. Managing and monitoring actions occurred in a material world of resources and events. The people who developed and implemented the new administrative policies were problem solvers who generated knowledge and coherenc˄ between ideas and actions across all three realms. They worked in particular ways. Working in a realm of ideas, their consequentialist moral thinking provided fresh structural imperatives. Ideological idealism and bureaucratic rationality tended to be challenged by the pragmatic evidence of outcomes, by the political weight of clients' interests or by the raw power of immediate economic and political contingencies. Their strategic (as opposed to philosophical) appraisals were also conducted in this abstract realm to complete the production and selection of significant ideas about the administrative services that systems should, and could feasibly, experience.

The second metaphysical realm was social. In this realm people experienced the politics of restructuring and enculturation. The politics of restructuring realigned organisational reality in three general phases; cultural destabilisation, intersubjective realities gradually cohering with the balance of values in the new administrative policy, and then the gradual dominance of one theory of reality. Past this point during most restructures, cultural devices such as retreats, seminars and conferences were used to coordinate members' perceptions of work and service in a hegemony of legitimation.

The third metaphysical realm was a material world. The day-to-day management of restructuring occurred in an objective reality of support mechanisms, efficient communications and effective operations. The language moved from normative to more rational metaphors as routinisation occurred. Monitoring rituals were revised, for example, to produce better empirical data on outcomes, and so, serve myths of 'reform' and 'success'.

A very important caveat is required here. While six distinct types of action were identified in three metaphysical realms, administrative restructuring actually occurred in participants' heads in a holistic manner. The boundaries between activities and realms were synthetic.

Provisional, pragmatic and holistic webs of belief developed about restructuring, using the components but not the linear sequence Hodgkinson (1981) suggested, but in the manner proposed by Evers and Lakomski (1991). Restructuring was conceptualised using a number of perspectives at the same time. The processes were inter-perspectival rather than multi-perspectival in nature. It was conceived of as an activity conducted in a practical reality of administrative behaviours and resources, outcomes, bricks and mortar, and dollars and cents. It used a material reality of empirical facts; the objective source of problems which require ideas, methodologies and values to solve or ameliorate. Despite the heavy weight of empiricism, however, the pragmatic holism involved also assumed the existence of a more arbitrary and contested social world in which accounts of 'restructuring' were constructed, renegotiated and changed. And, in addition to this social realm dominated by political and cultural agents, there was an existential reality in which 'restructuring' was a feature of personal experience and reflection. Policy-makers imagined futures, valued and speculated about strategic options. They reported radically changed powers, trau.natic schisms in relationships, and sometimes, the death and the bereavement of a dearly beloved aspect of their professional self.

While this pragmatic holism used distinctly different ways of thinking about the 'reality' of restructuring, and required generically different concepts, general knowledge of administrative policy was unpartitioned and given coherence by all encompassing myths. As Giddens (1984, p. 194) noted; "Myths mediate existential contradiction cognitively". The building blocks in the first material realm were things. The key concepts in the second social world were cultural artefacts. The third personal and abstract world was elaborated with trustworthy ideas that were mediated by ideology. And yet those most at home with the 'new administrative policy' seemed able to change epistemic gears easily, signalling the changes with metaphors in the hurly burly of administrative practice. The new myth sanctioned new attitudes towards the 'facts' and the old myth about the best way of being organised. The new myth evoked a modernist sense of rational certainty.

In each case study, once the policy making elites had generated the parameters of the new administrative policy, working parties, seminars and conferences quickly attracted and organised an infrastructure of pragmatic holists who managed implementation. These polymaths appeared to intuit or understand how generative conditions differed by realm, and to be in near complete command of the processes and language of structural change. The new myths, for example, were evoked, tested and eventually embedded when they helped others focus on (a) 'what is best' for students, themselves and society, (b) what is

really significant in determining outcomes, and, (c) how these ideas might cohere with a valued professional self. Questions were used to invoke reflection. The second and social world of political action and cultural elaboration was triggered by generating interaction. People were invited to discuss in groups how well the new policies would improve practices and structures. The key product was legitimacy. The third material world of things was evoked whenever people were persuaded to act in a concerted manner, to manage people and events and to evaluate outcomes. Commitment and the collection of data on consequences followed.

Whatever their substantive content, the properties of new administrative policies were never more than flexible and largely shared webs of beliefs; new myths about the situation and actions that seemed 'right and proper'. So compelling were the ways in which administrative policy myths were able to control people through hegemonic explanations of phenomena, the nature of the justificatory grand narrative usually referred to as 'policy' was examined in the case studies.

Policy as Myth

The Macquarie Dictionary (1990, p. 731) defines policy as course or line of action that has been adopted (a) as expedient (b) as prudent, practical and wise, and (c) pursued by a government, ruler, political party, or the like. Put another way, policies are systems of explanation of the situation and justification for taking action in 'right and proper' ways, but importantly, explanations and justifications held by those with the power to decide directions. So, whatever their substantive content, and the consequences are usually real in all manner of ways, the technical properties of myths and policies are, by definition, virtually identical with one significant difference. While both are socially constructed systems of explanation and justification, and myth works through the silent and normative bias of a culture, a 'policy' exhibits its power more openly; it is a power-packed and power-backed myth. Myth has the hidden subtlety of conditioned or condign power (Galbraith, 1984). Policy gets its leverage through the use of both condign and coercive power (Luke, 1974).

The potency of administrative policy became apparent when the many types of myths (Murray, 1960) were related to the arts of reorganising people. Cosmological and creation

myths were frequently heard in explanations of how 'the organisation' originally began, how it began again after 'reforms' and in analyses that assumed that the organisations involved were parts of a natural system (Greenfield, 1975) that had endured a rebirthing. These explanations suggested cosmic order and meaning, and how the organised world came into being. Larue (1975, p. 24) speculated that cosmological statements may symbolise a primal rejection of chaos, sterility, psychic and psychological disorder and be an attempt to impose cyclical or other patterns on a world that can be apprehended but not fully comprehended. And (Eliot, 1976, P. 23):

> since myth is always related to the "creation" (the world, man, a specific organistion, etc.), it constitues the paradigm for all human acts. By knowing it, one knows the "origin" of things, and hence can control and manipulate them at will. This is a knowledge that one "experiences" ritually, either by ceremonially recounting the myth or performing the ritual for which it serves as both a model and a justification.

For example, whatever the disruptive effects of restructuring in the various cases, seasonal myths (Gaster, 1968) were soon evident in public rites that recreated the cosmology of schools and the institutionalised organisation known as a 'state system of schools'. Kenotic rituals dramatised the loss of vitality in systems and the ebbing of life and time, including rites of mortification and purgation that helped remove accumulated guilt over the loss of legitimation. The early retirement dinners were examples. Similarly, the rites of plerosis dramatised a new lease on life, especially through invigoration and jubilation rites such as the celebration of program budgeting and corporate planning rituals. The basic purpose of cosmological myths during restructurings was to affirm creation, the goodness and meaning of life, community, and the links between cosmic, system and local order.

Second, identity myths helped people understand their role as human beings and typically employed a hero figure who symbolised a person in search of personal identification and success in the new order. There were many stories during restructurings about how colleagues coped with 'reforms', sustained their professional status and regained the respect and accolades of their peers. These identity myths tended to reinforce collegiality, lower competition, undermine the use of comparative performance indicators and displace technical and client perspectives with professional conceptions of service, much as described by Elmore and Associates (1990). This confirmed Meyer and Rowan's (1977, p.

357) view that identity myths emphasising professionalism insulate formal structures and service activity from expert evaluation.

The general evidence is that, in order to avoid conflict and the further lowering of public legitimacy, 'schools' in systems have tended to be decoupled from teaching and from each other. In almost all cases, 'professionalism' has been encouraged, and responsibility for quality teaching has been delegated to 'professionals' along with a major intensification of the role. Responsibility for 'learning' has been delegated to 'students'. 'Leadership' has been delegated to those in positions of authority. The goals of educations have been generalised into ambiguous and categorical ends rather than into measurable outcomes and technical competencies. Schools (not educators) develop citizens (not achievements). Teachers still teach subjects at the more advanced levels, not people, and the integration of knowledge taught has been avoided. In most cases of system restructuring, the inspection and evaluation of teaching and leadership services have been reduced to ceremonies, symbolic actions or neglected. Human relations have been made important to the extent that critical questions about accountabilities have become almost inadmissible.

In sum, in the wake of restructurings, identity myths have set highest priority on professionalism, categorical ends and human relations. This means that they serve to decouple teaching, learning and leadership, validate the formal structures of education systems. mobilise support from a broad range of internal and external constituencies, and help reassert a front of confidence and good faith.

Third, eschatological myths have been evident in stories about radical restructurings, mergers and takeovers. Eschatological myths explain the end of an age. The restructurings examined have used the symbols of life and death and resurrection, future rewards and punishments, and apocalyptic visions of a golden age. The glossy corporate prospectus, replete with symbols of progress, efficiency and care, has tended to replace the Green Paper and the White Paper of the Westminster process. Similarly, death-of-God myths deal with the ending of great commitments and often symbolise human alienation from mythic structures. Contemporary examples include the pain that many educators report over the flight from equity as nations search for excellence, choice and efficiency during restructurings (Beare, 1992). Another example is the discomfit that school principals feel over their distance from the world of teaching. Future myths provide a basis for thinking about the mythic patterns that may be emerging in our society and to project what mythic themes may become dominant (eg. Beare and Slaughter, 1993).

Perhaps the form of myth most closely related to the making and remaking of administrative policy are societal myths or myths of social identification. The evidence in the research is that these myths define organisational patterns, from group to system levels, and explain why forms of social differentiation exist within groups, communities and organisational divisions. They defined acceptable norms for conduct. They explained structures at two levels; appropriate patterns of relationships, and the officially sanctioned assumptions about how people should relate, echoing Gidden's (1984) structuration thesis. These societal myths also legitimated the distribution of knowledge, power and resources between groups and give form to communal life in schools and systems of schools. The capacity of administrative policies to control people through hegemonic explanations of phenomena and justifications for action appeared to be very high. Wider and historical sources were consulted to verify this capacity. In the next section, evidence is reviewed of how the coherence between societal myths and administrative policies can provide hegemonic control for quite lengthy periods.

Myths as Hegemonies

Dr Beeby, Director of Education from 1940 to 1960 in New Zealand, described (in Renwick, 1986) his system's educational policy process as a series of societal myths that had, in turn, gained preponderant influence. He explained how education policies evolved from the competition between myths. His authoritative case was that three myths have dominated educational thought since the turn of the century in New Zealand; 'survival of the fittest', 'equal opportunities' and 'equal outcomes'. My extrapolation of Beeby's logic (Macpherson, 1987), to propose that a fourth myth, namely 'equal power', was imminent, was questioned by Beeby at the time but proved itself a year later when the Picot Report (1988) devolved substantial powers to be shared by elected stakeholders on schools' Boards of Trustees.

The presence of 'educational myths', Beeby noted, explain the mobilisation of bias in education services and the mindsets and assumptions that have prevailed at particular times. He also noted the central role that myths play in reconciling new ideas with the old without disturbing the "hard-won consensus on which any effective educational policy depends" (1986, p. xv-xvi):

Each generation creates, or simply assumes, its own educational myths and its own unattainable but approachable goals, with at least an appearance of permanence, on which to build its plans for education. To be both acceptable and effective, a myth has to meet certain conditions: it must be in general accord with some strong - though not always clearly defined - public aspiration: it must be expressed in language flexible enough to permit a reasonably wide range of interpretations, and yet specific enough to provide practical guidance to administrators, planners and teachers; it must be unattainable, at least for that generation, if it is to sustain twenty-five years of change without being constantly and confusingly modified. With the wisdom of hindsight, we now know that it is unattainable in another more subtle sense, that, by the time it is close enough to be seen clearly, its weaknesses will have become apparent, and a rival myth will be edging its way into the centre of vision. The final paradox is that the key people working under the myth must believe in it so completely that they will fight for it in its youth (while perhaps in their youth); must hold to it, though more critically, in its middle age, and yet eventually be willing to see another myth set up in its place when it has served its purpose.

Beeby also highlighted the symbiotic relationship between education policies and societal myths (1986, p. xvi):

Fashions may come and go, and we may or may not learn from them, but educational myths, if they are deep-rooted in the community from which they spring, are the very means by which an education system matures. A myth is far more than a a temporary substitute for a clear view of 'reality'. It embodies ideals and aspirations, and, ... if myths stimulate us to alter 'reality', the consequent practical changes then lead us to adopt new myths. There is an inevitable continuity in myths, however different they may appear.

The flexible, symbolic, holistic and hegemonic nature of myths was also confirmed. Beeby recalled myths as a form of communication within groups, between groups, between leaders and between generations. While myth is a communication that cannot be taken quite literally, he argued, it gains "public credence and support from its capacity to express in relatively simple terms, relations between ideas and events that are not completely

understood and whose outcomes cannot be fully foreseen" (1986, p. xvi). This also permits plural interpretations within limits, accommodates the irrational aspects of human existence and provides a line or course of action, rather than providing prescriptions or absolute outcomes to be achieved. Beeby's myths-as-hegemonies thesis assumed that policy myths are built, altered and terminated according to (a) the values of leading myth makers, (b) the interaction of influential policy-makers, and (c) the contexts that in large part predetermine the mindsets of policy-makers. It also presumed that this dialectical process would continue to involve values, data, conjecture and refutation, and that myths will continue to operate at very aggregated levels of perceptions and preferences in education systems. But like ancient faiths, myths do not die, Beeby argued, they fade as they are subsumed into the fresh interpretation provided by a new myth.

Is there corroboration of myths acting as grand narrative in education systems? McPherson and Raab's (1988, p. 499) monumental study of how Scottish education policy has been governed since 1945 provided extensive support. With regard to the intrinsic nature of policies, they concluded that:

> it was helpful to characterise these representations of the world as myths, as stories that people tell about themselves to celebrate values and experience ... the same type of analysis applies no less to the idea of an educational system as the product of partners in a common enterprise ... we find a symbiosis of fact and value, a theory supported by the data it has helped to create, and a 'tradition constructed through the selective reinterpretation of the past. The same is broadly true, we think, of the higher order stories told by pluralist and corporatist theory. What ultimately makes the arbitration of all these explanations difficult is not paucity of evidence, nor conceptual overload, but the disputed nature of the reality that the theories claim to represent, and the value judgements that inevitably they incorporate.

Conclusions

Administrators are consistently faced with choices: between maximising personal freedoms and communal security, between tightly structured order and anarchic disorder, between regulating in order to protect personal liberty and making rules that violate the rights of

individuals and minorities, and between celebrating the accomplishments of the individuals or the group. Societal myths give form to organisations by providing norms for interaction, justification for action and attitudes, stratifying members into roles and resources into priority areas. They proclaim attitudes towards 'reality' and 'the facts' and herein lies the power of myth. When the cultural power of myth is magnified by becoming 'administrative policy' it acquires the hegemonic legitimacy of the state.

Organisations do not have myths about themselves. People use myths about themselves to give coherence to their identity, social place, actions and the major events in their lives. Their 'organisations' are social constructions. Shared myths are used to order and legitimate these constructions. Myths organise the way people see 'the facts' and understand their organised selves and their 'real' world. Myths are concerted imaginings, and when given grand narrative powers as 'administrative policy', they can become pervasively influential.

Myths mediate cognition of existential and structural contradictions. Old myths are not changed by new facts but by new attitudes towards facts. Old myths are those that have suffered in competition with new myths. Myths are by their nature, arbitrary, drawing on empirical facts, subjective impressions and instinct, and on normative data. They describe and prescribe not just the 'real' world of 'fact' but perception and experiences in the disputed 'real' world.

The practical implications are immense, especially in a purportedly post-modern world where the possibility of one and accurate grand narrative is denied and where the processes of constantly becoming are emphasised (Miller, 1990). Administrative policy making can be about building myths and structures that remain salient, contestable, and therefore, predisposed to and available for improvement. McPherson and Raab (1988, p. 501) took this view when they argued that legitimacy should be used as a touchstone;

> The essential point to grasp ... is that the policy community's own account of
> the world, sustained as it was by myth, could be rationally engaged by means
> of the very terms on which the community's claim to legitimacy was based ...
> where a department or a government has to explain in order to govern, there is
> at least a prospect of improvement in explanation and in governability alike.
> History and myth, policy and practice: the democratic intellect was all of
> these, and is so still.

Notes

1.   I am indebted to Bill Boyd, Pat Forsyth and Kevin Wilson for so vigorously testing these ideas when I first offered them at Pennsylvania State University, 14 April, 1994. It lends support to the comforting notion that it could be the competition between theories that guarantees the growth of knowledge.

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